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HAMLET AND THE MYSTERY OF AMY ROBSART¹

BY JAMES WESTFALL THOMPSON

THE fact that *Hamlet* is preëminently a psychological play and Shakespeare's greatest drama has made it the object of an imposing amount of criticism. It is no exaggeration to say that a whole library exists upon *Hamlet* alone. Aside from the major problem of the play: Is Hamlet a philosopher? Is Hamlet mad? Is Hamlet Shakespeare himself? a whole swarm of minor problems tease the mind. How old was Hamlet? Was he fat or lean? In how far was Queen Gertrude guilty of the murder of the king? Was she an accomplice, or a passive tool? Was she deceived? What is the real character of Ophelia? Was Hamlet really in love with her, or did he use her as a foil? Is the play merely a story told in dramatic form? or has it an ulterior motive? Did Shakespeare wish to point a moral as well as to adorn a tale? Is *Hamlet* fiction or history? If so, in how far?

It may be as idle to attempt to answer these questions as to ask them, seeing that all discussion of them would seem to have been worn threadbare long since. Does not the eighth annual Shakespeare Lecture delivered before the British Academy some years ago by Sir Walter Raleigh cry "*Procul! procul!*" to all new investigators of Shakespeare? For "there is nothing new and important to be said of Shakespeare" he declares, and certainly exemplifies it in this address.

The early history of the drama may be briefly summarized. It is mentioned as a new play in 1602. In 1603 it was published for the first time in quarto form, (Q 1) perhaps by a pirate publisher from stenographic notes surreptitiously procured when the drama was first presented. In the next year (1604) another and different

¹ If a document has once been interpreted in a particular sense, and that interpretation has survived unchallenged sufficiently long for men to be educated in it, it is no small task to win acceptance for any other view.—A. W. Pollard, *A Census of Shakespeare's Plays in quarto, 1594-1709*, p. xii. New Haven, 1916.

quarto edition appeared (Q 2). In 1623 the definitive folio edition (F—the *textus receptus*) was published. It is evident, from a comparison of the two quarto editions, that Shakespeare, departing from his customary habit, carefully rewrote *Hamlet*.²

In the first quarto Polonius is called Corambis. Why so? And why the change of his name later? It is of interest to learn that Corambis is a name fabricated from the Latin *crambe*, meaning a cabbage, hence a cabbage-head, a dullard, and that the character was certainly intended as a composite mocking portraiture of Sir William Cecil, the great Lord Burghley (died 1598), Elizabeth's famous Minister of State, and his son and successor, Sir Robert Cecil. Shakespeare later altered the name to Polonius. The new form seems to have been suggested to him by the appearance of a book now forgotten, but then well known, written by a Polish scholar of the sixteenth century, one Laurentius Grimalius Goslicius, entitled *De optimo senatore*, published at Venice in 1568, and translated into English in 1598.

It is an inescapable conclusion that in the revised version of *Hamlet* Shakespeare introduced a large element of the personal equation. He manifestly carefully rewrote the play and in so doing departed from his traditional practice not only in his modification of the source, but also in his treatment of episode and incident.

Beyond doubt Shakespeare is in *Hamlet* more than in any other of his dramas. But it is trivial, it seems to me, to discover the evidence of Shakespeare in *Hamlet* in the "players' scene," where commentators point out an allusion to Shakespeare's own Globe theatre and the competition which his company experienced from the popularity of a rival company; or again, to cite Hamlet's technical instructions to the strolling actors as evidence of Shakespeare's personality in the play. His personality is deeper than these things; of the very texture of the drama and fluid throughout it.

In the interpretation of any of Shakespeare's plays it is well not to forget that however much Shakespeare's imagination may have transcended his time, his knowledge did not exceed or even equal that of his age. Moreover, a drama is a story related in dia-

² See Herford and Wigdery, *First Quarto edition of Hamlet*, London, 1880; Charlton M. Lewis, *The Genesis of Hamlet*, New York, 1907.

logue form and its primary purpose is to entertain. Instruction is a secondary consideration. Finally, and especially in a play purporting to be based on actual history, it was natural, even inevitable, that Shakespeare should have woven in contemporary allusions or incidents which, however much metamorphosed in the drama, nevertheless were recognized as familiar by the audience. The interest of a modern play is sustained by precisely this quality. It is certain that the whole body of Elizabethan drama abounds in incidents and allusions which escape us to-day because we do not know enough of the persons and events of the time. Things which were "palpable hits" with an Elizabeth crowd and excited applause or hisses, utterly elude our perception when we read the plays. Thousands have read *Hamlet*, yet it was exactly three hundred years after the first appearance of the play before Professor Gollancz demonstrated that Polonius was intended as a burlesque portrait of the two Cecils. Is it possible to think that the audiences which first saw the play failed to perceive the point?

A striking instance in *Hamlet* of how Shakespeare utilized contemporary incident (and one which I have never seen indicated) is the eavesdropping of Polonius behind the arras. During the trial of the Earl of Essex, Elizabeth's quondam favorite, for conspiracy in 1601, Essex charged Sir Robert Cecil with having said to a member of the Queen's Council that the title of the Spanish Infanta to the crown of England was as good as that of any other claimant when Elizabeth died. "Scarce had he spoken the words," writes Camden, "when Cecil, who stood hidden in a close room just by and heard all, bolted forth into the court, and falling on his knees, besought the lord steward that he might have leave to answer so false and foul an accusation."³ It is not recorded, but it might easily have occurred, that when Cecil made this abrupt appearance, as it were from "behind the arras", Essex's sarcastic comment was: "I thought I smelled a rat." Certainly this

³ Camden, *Annals*, IV, Feb. 19, 1601.

Camden's version slightly differs from that given by Cobbett's *State Trials*. Mr. H. L. Stephen has printed still another variant in his edition of *State Trials*. Mr. Algernon Cecil, in the life of his distinguished ancestor, *Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury*, p. 143, actually says that "Cecil stepped out from *behind the arras*," yet, amazing as it seems to me, never seems to have perceived the parallelism between this actual incident and Polonius. Perhaps he did not wish to.

dramatic incident in the trial of Essex, and Cecil's conduct, must have been the talk of London when it happened, and the closeness of the parallel between Polonius and the Minister of State quickly perceived by the audience.

But this parallel between Polonius and Burghley and his son is not the only striking analogy in *Hamlet*. Conrad in Germany and Mrs. Rhys in England find a close connection between the tragedy of Hamlet and that of young Robert, Earl of Essex, a friend of Shakespeare. Dudley, later the great Earl of Leicester, the Queen's lover, according to this argument no doubt poisoned the young Earl's father and lived in liaison with Lettice Knollys, his mother, whom he later married when Elizabeth's hand proved beyond his grasp. Other critics there are who discover a parallelism between the position of James I, when yet only King of Scotland, whose mother Mary Stuart was suspected of complicity in the murder of Darnley, James's father, and who soon afterwards married Bothwell, most certainly one of Darnley's murderers. The late William Preston Johnson advanced this theory over twenty years ago; it has gained acceptance in England and Germany, and so recently as last spring a new work entitled *Hamlet and the Scottish Succession* was published. It must be admitted that each of these theories has elements of plausibility, the latter particularly so because of the fact that a prince is concerned, and the question of the Scottish succession and the union of England and Scotland was a live one when Shakespeare wrote.

Essex and James I may have vaguely influenced Shakespeare's treatment of Hamlet. But his intention in *Hamlet* pierced far below portrayal of their wrongs, even admitting that he had the young Earl and the young Prince at all in mind. Beyond a doubt, I think, Shakespeare in *Hamlet* meant to inveigh against some of the worst abuses of his time: court intrigue and administrative corruption, chicanery in diplomacy, espionage and eavesdropping in high official circles, grave miscarriage in the administration of justice, and above all the appalling prevalence of assassination in Tudor England.

In his recent book on *Tudor Ideals* Mr. Einstein writes:

Lord Oxford tried to have Sidney murdered. John Stanhope with twenty men attempted to kill Sir Charles Cavendish. Leicester was charged with

seeking to assassinate the French envoy Simier, who had informed the queen about his secret marriage to Lady Essex. . . . Perhaps one reason why the Elizabethan drama, save in the greater Shakespearian masterpieces, remains so dead to us is the lack of contact between modern life and private vengeance.

If the reader interested in this phenomenon finds Mr. Einstein too brief, let him read the pages of Mr. Schwarz's introduction to his edition of Chapman's *Alphonsus Emperor of Germany*, where he will find abundant evidence that the sixteenth century was fearfully familiar with the use of the poignard and poison.

Ambition, cupidity, lust, revenge were unbridled passions of the day in Elizabethan England among the great, who compassed the destruction of their enemies without remorse; who browbeat or bribed the courts and whose deeds supine or frightened judges, ministers of state, and even the Queen often condoned. Anyone who knows intimately the inner history of the reigns of Elizabeth and James I knows that murder in the seats of the mighty was of fearfully common occurrence. It is no exaggeration to say that the tale of the notorious murders which happened during these two reigns is "an abstract and brief chronicles of the time", and that some who heard these words of Hamlet must have perceived their stinging applicability.

Hamlet is Shakespeare's protest against the condition of Elizabethan England. It was not Denmark but England that was rotten. Not merely Hamlet, but Shakespeare felt that "the time is out of joint". It was literally true, if the secrets of the murders of Shakespeare's own time could have been revealed, that more things in heaven and earth would come to light than men's philosophy dreamed. Hamlet's vehement language, earnestness, sense of outraged right, protest against wrong, combination of wrath and melancholy, make him a character unlike any other in Shakespeare's plays. It is impossible to identify him, and yet he is vaguely identifiable. The charm and mystery of the drama is that Shakespeare seems everywhere in it and through it. He is tantalizingly tangible, and yet so elusive that the thought flees one as he tries to clutch it. The lyric quality in the soliloquy sounds like spiritual autobiography; the "stings and arrows of outrageous fortune" the protest of a sensitive man against the wrongs of the time. The importance of an

upright man in a bad age to cope with the evils of the time is the tragedy of all great spirits, and often with such souls it must have been either stoicism or conscience or cowardice which kept them from suicide.

Lest I be suspected of unduly exaggerating the effect of these dark and suspicious tales upon the popular mind let me quote a paragraph from Mr. Algernon Cecil's life of Sir Robert Cecil:

It is natural to ask at the outset . . . whether these ugly stories are really entitled to the notice which chroniclers accord them. To the philosophic historian, indeed, they appear to be of the slightest consequence; scarcely distinguishable in kind from the murder trials whose process and detail the newsboys of to-day press upon us at the street corners. The constitutional historian, again, regards them coldly, making but little account of one name more or less in a catalogue of conspiracies. But in the less rarified atmosphere in which the biographer and the annalist live and move and have their being, such matters are of vast importance. All the temper of the times is latent in their folds. To study those things by which men were greatly moved, to interrogate the sources of common hopes and fears, is to find the key to the practical statesmanship of the age. The tragedies of Shakespeare, revolving as they so constantly do, around the subject of treachery, are a lasting reminder of the part which treason and plot played in the life of the sixteenth century. They disclose imaginatively what the plots of Lopez and Squire and Essex and Catesby reveal actually—the extreme instability of government. The sovereign was bound to have a lively expectation of meeting death by the cup or the dagger. . . . The thrust and parry of the assassin's dagger or the courtier's tongue are as vital an element in the politics of that century as the thrust and parry of parliamentary debate in our own.

But I would not emphasize the general indictment in *Hamlet* of the manners and morals of the time too much. The whole play has a concreteness and an applicability of a *particular* nature, in spite of generalities, although these qualities are not easily discoverable. *Hamlet* was "caviare to the general" for the reason that Shakespeare dared not cut too close to the quick—or rather dared not make his portraiture too obvious. He was as objective as he dared to be, and sufficiently obvious to those whom he wished to reach to satisfy him.

If one reads, as it were, between the lines of *Hamlet*, and fathoms the depth of all the guarded allusions and irony in the play, measuring these depths by the conduct of certain men and women of the time and certain well known events, the conclusion

seems to me unavoidable that Shakespeare was specifically aiming at the notorious relations of Queen Elizabeth and Leicester, and that the *cause célèbre* around which the play of *Hamlet* revolves is not the murder of Essex nor the murder of Darnley, nor the case of young Essex nor James of Scotland, but the more mysterious case of the death of Amy Robsart, Leicester's first wife. It is true that the event had happened as far back as 1560 and that Leicester had died in 1588. But the memory of the great Earl's dark passion for Elizabeth and her infatuation for him, and the mystery of Amy's death, lived on. As late as 1599 the accusation was still made. Indeed the subsequent notorious love affairs of the "seeming virtuous Queen" enlarged these scandals. As long as Elizabeth lived it was, of course, impossible publicly to criticize her, were it never so guardedly done. It is significant that the appearance of *Hamlet* upon the stage coincides with the death of Elizabeth. Burghley had died in 1598.

It seems strange, so far as I know Shakespearean literature, that no critic has perceived the remarkable applicability of the tragedy of Amy Robsart to *Hamlet*. The language of the play most startlingly fits in with the case of Amy Robsart, the suspicion resting upon Leicester of having compassed her murder, and the suspected liaison between Leicester and Elizabeth.

The facts, so far as they are ascertainable, in regard to Amy Robsart's death, may be soon told. But the penumbra of darkness which still surrounds these few facts is black and wide. Amy Robsart was the first wife of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, whose ambition to marry Elizabeth and protestations of love for her were only equalled by the Queen's indiscreet passion for him. This "courtship" began in the very first year of her reign. Within little more than a year after her accession, while Leicester was away from home in attendance upon the court at Windsor, his wife was found (September 8, 1560) dead with a broken neck by "a fall from a pair of stairs" according to her husband, at the foot of a circular stairway in Leicester's manor house, Cumnor Hall, near Oxford.

Was it accident? or suicide? or murder? We may eliminate the second hypothesis surely, for people do not commit suicide by throwing themselves downstairs; the experience is likely to be

more painful than fatal. What has been the judgment of historians in the matter? It is undeniable that most of them believe Amy's death to have been due to accident. But their conclusions are usually framed in very guarded or qualifying language. For example, the late Frederick William Maitland, a very accomplished historian and a lawyer to boot, cautiously has written:

Some people said at once that he (Leicester) had procured her death; and that story was soon being told in all the courts of Europe; but we have no proof that it was generally believed in England after a coroner's jury had given a verdict which, whatever may have been its terms, exculpated the husband. Dudley had throughout his life many bitter enemies, but none of them, so far as we know, ever mentioned any evidence of his guilt that a modern English judge would dream of leaving to a jury. . . . Quadra, Dudley, Cecil and Elizabeth were all of them experts in mendacity, and the exact truth we are not likely to know.

The array of qualifying phrases in this disclaimer is interesting.

The suspicion at once aroused, that Amy Robsart was murdered with the connivance of Leicester and the foreknowledge of Elizabeth, has never since been entirely dissipated in spite of the diligent investigation of historians. Certain it is that a clear cut verdict of "not guilty" cannot yet be brought in until we know more than we now do. It is no refutation to say that the reign of Elizabeth was filled with treason and plot, scurrility and scandal, and that Elizabeth has been made the innocent victim of slander. The circumstantial evidence is too damaging for that.

Whether guilty or not guilty of the death of his wife, Leicester's first feeling was not one of love and regret for Amy, but of anxiety about himself, as his letter of September 9 to Blount, one of his intimate agents and confidants, shows.

Considering what the malicious world will bruit . . . and because I have no way to purge myself of the malicious talk that I know the wicked will use . . . I do pray you . . . that you will use all the devices and means you can possibly for learning the truth . . . charging him (the coroner) to the uttermost from me to have good regard to make choice of no light or slight persons, but the discreetest and most substantial men, for the juries, such as for their knowledge may be able to search thoroughly and duly, by all manner of examinations, the bottom of the matter.

These are fair words on the surface. But what did Lord Robert really mean to imply to his trusted agent when he instructed

him to charge the coroner to have regard unto the kind of men to be empaneled? Did he want to make sure of a "packed" jury? On September 13 the faithful Blount writes assuring his master that "I have done your lordship's message unto the jury". By what right under the law could Leicester so instruct the jury? He was as yet neither witness nor defendant. It is strange that he was not summoned to appear. Why not? That the handling of the case either was very loose, or that Leicester used illicit inducements or pressure to convince the jury of his complete innocence, seems a just inference. For an undated letter written a few days later by him to Blount expresses satisfaction that he has "received a letter from one Smith that seemeth to be the foreman of the jury". This is damaging evidence and sustains the suspicion entertained by many writers that the jury was tampered with. It is certainly very significant that no record of the coroner's verdict has ever been found, *nor any other official records* pertaining to the case.

It must be assumed that some kind of coroner's inquest was made. Negligence in this particular was an indictable offense by English statute, and in this very year, 1560, the Berkshire coroner was prosecuted for such misconduct. It is evident from the correspondence between Leicester and Blount that a coroner's jury was called. If this jury returned any other verdict than accidental death, further court proceedings would have been necessary, whether the jury's finding was murder or suicide, and these proceedings would be a matter of record. If so, it is singular that not a scrap of court record pertaining to the case of Amy Robsart has come down to us. Failing the coroner's minutes, another source of examination has been the Controlment Rolls of the King's Bench and the Assize and Quarter Sessions Records. But these sources have been searched in vain. An informal inquiry by the Privy Council was made in 1567, but *not a word appears in its proceedings* with reference to the case. It is conceivable that when the Privy Council took cognizance of the case all the official records were removed from their regular place of deposit and not returned. But if so, its conduct was very exceptional. For the usual practice in appealed or reviewed causes was to procure a certified copy of the original records. The argu-

ment from silence is always a dangerous one for the historian to invoke, but it looks as if there had been a studied endeavor to suppress all evidence.

New and acute interest in the real fate of Amy Robsart was created in the 'eighties by the appearance of Froude's *History of England*. While working in the Spanish archives at Simancas, Froude came upon a letter of De Quadra, the Spanish ambassador in England in 1560, written to Philip II. It is a report of an intimate conversation of the ambassador with Cecil himself. The translation of this letter as given by Froude is very damaging to the reputation of Elizabeth and her favorite, and the conclusion seems almost unavoidable that both had foreknowledge of what happened at Cumnor Hall on September 8 of that year.

In spite of Froude's notorious prejudices and his fatal gift of inaccuracy, an indictment like this could not pass unchallenged. In 1886 the late James Gairdner, one of the most accomplished of modern English historians and an authority on the age of the Tudors, reëxamined all the evidence he could find and published the results of his researches in an article in the July number of *The English Historical Review*. It was no great difficulty for Gairdner to show that Froude had both confused his dates and mistranslated the original language of De Quadra's despatch. But still the mystery would not down. There were raveled ends to it and stray bits of evidence which it was difficult to engage. Seven years later Andrew Lang, for whose mind historical mysteries ever had an attraction, attacked the problem anew in *Blackwood's Magazine* and alleged that Gairdner had put unnatural construction upon evidence which, if rightly construed, was very detrimental to Leicester and Elizabeth. It was in this article that Lang made the keen suggestion that if the truth were ever found it would be discovered in local court records. But these were searched in vain.

It so happened that at this juncture the editors of *The Encyclopædia Britannica* had invited Gairdner to write an article upon Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, for that vast repository of classified information. Gairdner, "from a conviction that no one was qualified to write even a brief article on such an ambiguous character without investigation of all the unpublished evidences

at Cambridge and at Hatfield House (the seat of the Cecils) touching Amy Robsart's death," again painfully filtered all the old evidence and added certain new information. However, as the *Britannica*, in the interests of brevity, limited its contributions to facts, Gairdner published his argument and interpretation in *The Athenaeum*, February 18, March 4, 11, 18, 1893.

Gairdner flattered himself that he "had got at the bottom of the mystery", and believed that he had unraveled the "full story". But unfortunately for this comfortable conclusion, in 1911 Mr. E. K. Purnell cast new light on the tragedy in his *Report on the Pepys Manuscripts* preserved at Magdalen College, Cambridge. In these papers a new and important letter was discovered, written by Thomas Blount to Leicester in 1567 in regard to the charge that the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Suffolk attempted to bribe Amy's half-brother John Appleyard to implicate Leicester. This document seems to throw the balance more than ever in favor of Leicester—and of course, of Elizabeth, too. And this opinion acquires greater strength farther on in this same collection when we come upon a friendly letter of Cecil addressed to Leicester, the last paragraph of which, in Mr. Purnell's words, "goes far to prove that he believed Leicester to be innocent in the matter of Amy Robsart." But this placid conclusion is soon traversed. For within a year we find Cecil writing anxiously to Leicester: "If Wm. Huggyns (he was another of the Earl's confidential agents) be with your Lordship, I pray you let him come with your Lordship that he may be spoken withall upon the sudden concerning Appleyard, *for amongst them they will fall out in their own colors.*" Evidently there were so many parties to the "frame up" at Cumnor Hall that the authorized version of Amy Robsart's death was encountering rough water in the cross-currents of gossip which were rife in both countryside and court.

As long as Elizabeth lived even guarded criticism was dangerous. It required a change of dynasty to release even veiled speech. As for flat, open discussion of the mystery of Amy Robsart or any other murder case of note, it was still quite impossible. Hence Shakespeare's resort to a drama in which under camouflaged guise Londoners might perceive the real spirit and condition of the age. *Hamlet* is the most brilliant assortment of double-

edged language, covert criticism, cutting allusion to contemporary men, women and events, burning scorn, withering irony, to be found in any literature. If read aright, the play dazes and astounds the reader by its keenness, its satire, the stinging lash of its language, its mockery or condemnation of some of the very greatest personages in Elizabethan England. So veiled and elusive are the expressions sometimes that, save to the initiated, the dialogue is cryptic.

Nothing in English literature so abounds with Sophoclean irony as *Hamlet*. The play bristles with words and phrases which, in addition to their natural meaning, have a deeper and ominous implication veiled from the ordinary auditor, and even from the actors themselves. It is beyond argument, I think, that Shakespeare in *Hamlet* deliberately intended to write for an audience quite different from that in front of the footlights. Truly the play must have been "caviare to the general", and this cryptic quality still puzzles many.

In the light of what has been written, and apart from the general plot, which itself has large intimations, let us now turn to the pages of the play in order to see how many of the allusions in it seem to have a positive index, and probably do darkly refer to the case of Amy Robsart, to Leicester and Elizabeth.

By a forgèd process of my death.

The phrase admirably defines what must have been a widely prevalent opinion with regard to the case of Amy Robsart.

. . . most seeming-virtuous queen. . . .
Assume a virtue if you have it not.

One can imagine men in the audience who heard these words look at one another with a question in their eyes, or a faintly significant smile upon their lips, or shrug their shoulders with shrewd amusement.

Leave her to heaven,
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge.

Verily these were thorny words indeed to say; thornier than ever if Elizabeth was the actual object of the speech.

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

This famous saying has become so debased by quotation that it sounds commonplace. Consider how fresh and new it must have seemed to those who first heard it, ringing like a hammer stroke upon an anvil amid a resounding storm of apposite and clever dialogue.

Though this be madness, yet there's method in't.

Who were there among those wise in worldliness and the intricacies and chicanery of the politics and diplomacy of that day who did not find a fang in this remark? None but men steeped in the great secrets of the reign of Elizabeth could have fully perceived the significance of Hamlet's words, or the marvellously subtle method Shakespeare employed to convey his message, and with them silence was discretion.

Caviare to the general.

Shakespeare certainly knew and intended the play to be over the heads of the crowd, and too enigmatic to ordinary readers of the text. He was content to have them think it merely a drama. For the initiated, *Hamlet* had quite another import. Yet even the dullards were given a broad hint in the seemingly casual mention that a play might be "an abstract and brief chronicle" of the time, an idea repeated in Hamlet's exclamation:

The play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.

"King" or "Queen" mattered little to Shakespeare. The principle and the point were identical in either case.

Hamlet explains to the court assembled to hear the play:

You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife;

and a few lines farther on, turning to Horatio he says:

For thou dost know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself: and now reigns here
A very, very — pajock;

to which his friend rejoins:

You might have rhymed.

All the commentators have passed over this portion of the dialogue without comment, save to explain that *pajock* means peacock. They have no explanation of the singular use of the word, nor do they perceive anything remarkable in Horatio's reply. Yet this is one of the most significant parts of the play. What word most naturally occurs to the mind which will rhyme with *was*? Though obsolete to-day, in Elizabethan times the word *coz* was common in court circles. It was the abridged and more familiar form of the word *cousin*. The sovereign according to etiquette, addressed every peer in England as "cousin," and in cases of intimate friendship as "coz." The custom arose with the accession of Henry VII. For during the War of the Roses the old feudal nobility was fearfully reduced, so that when he became king, the first Tudor actually was cousin to almost every peer of the realm.

Elizabeth often called her favorite "coz," and certainly that arrogant and gaudy bird, the peacock, admirably typified Leicester. Between the word expressed and the word implied by the rhyme, there is little room for Leicester to escape between the posts. It is impossible not to believe that Shakespeare's audience and readers of the drama saw the point—and it was a telling one—although the significance has been unperceived.

I will speak daggers to her, but use none.

The words are not merely a strong metaphor. They were intended to stab at actualities. And hard upon the threat follow the Queen's words:

O, speak to me no more;
These words like daggers enter in mine ears.

In the players' scene the stage instructions tell us: "The poisoner woos the queen with gifts: she seems loth and unwilling awhile, but in the end accepts." Leicester's wooing of Queen Elizabeth was notorious, and the richness of his gifts to her nearly bankrupted him.

None wed the second but who killed the first.

If there is a "palpable hit" anywhere in *Hamlet* it is this line.

The lady doth protest too much.

Elizabeth's official and personal disclaimers of innocence of the charges which scandal attributed to her tended to prove the proverb that where there's smoke there's fire. In 1565 Morgan Roberts, a protégé of Leicester, who had his license to go to Spain, "unhonestly used his tongue" while there and reported the "Queen's court more like a stew than a place of degree and virtue." This is the admission of a candid friend of the Queen and her favorite, not an enemy.

Let the galled jade wince; our withers are unwrung.

The initiated who read this line must have laughed derisively in the privacy of their libraries. In spite of the subtle garb with which every incident and every character in *Hamlet* is draped, the boldness of this sentence astonishes.

In Act III, Scenes 3 and 4, are two allusions which seem to aim straight at the mystery of the death of Amy Robsart, and sustain the widely believed charge that bribery and intimidation were used with the jury in the case. The first quotation is:

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand *may shove by justice*,
And oft . . .

The other quotation occurs in Hamlet's impassioned speech to his mother in which he pleads with her to forsake her paramour, yet knows she will not. The whole speech should be read, but this is the salient extract of a terrible fusion of gall and bitterness:

Let the birds fly, and, like the famous ape,
To try conclusions, in the basket creep,
And break your own neck down.

To what forgotten fable this alludes no one knows, but remember that Amy Robsart was found dead at the foot of the staircase with her neck broken. When the King and Laertes are planning to compass Hamlet's death in Act IV, Scene 7, the former says:

And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe;
But even his mother *shall uncharge the practice,*
And call it accident.

This precisely describes what probably *was* done in the process of Amy Robsart. With a mere change of name the sentiment would fit Leicester or Elizabeth like a glove.

Wereach the scene in the churchyard. Applicability is especially apposite in the words of the priest who explains that the law of the mediæval church prohibited interment of a suicide in consecrated ground. This law the King had overruled by might of his prerogative. One sentence in the priest's reply has great significance:

Her death was doubtful;
And, *but that great command o'ersways the order*,
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd.

Is it vain imagining to see in this comment covert allusion to the exercise of undue influence in the coroner's inquest upon the death of Amy Robsart, although it is impossible to believe that the verdict of the jury was one of suicide? Finally, in the last scene of the play, when Hamlet lies dying, cryptic allusion abounds.

Wretched queen, adieu,
You that look pale and tremble. . . .
Had I but time
O, I could tell you,
But let it be. . . .
The rest is silence.

Why "silence"? Because Hamlet was so near to death? or because the whole truth could not yet be told? And truth about what? Things at the court of Denmark? Or things in the English court? And what thing there most? The mystery of Amy Robsart and Leicester's and Elizabeth's implication in her murder? We still wait for the whole answer to the question: How did Amy Robsart come to her death? Was she murdered or was it accident? But the enigma of *Hamlet* may partially unravel the riddle about Amy Robsart. Truly there are more things in *Hamlet* (and the same may be said of many of Shakespeare's other plays) than the critics have yet dreamed.

The universally accepted theory that Shakespeare only wrote history in his historical plays will not hold. His dramas bristle with current allusions which we to-day fail to perceive because we do not sufficiently know the intimate history of his time.

JAMES WESTFALL THOMPSON.